

DEC 2 1955

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100030016-0

# A Diplomatic Mona Lisa

*An Intimate Message from Washington*

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## WASHINGTON

A major mystery in Washington is how Secretary Dulles can be so optimistic.

Most of the evidence would seem to suggest the tide of world affairs is flowing against him. The spirit of Geneva has pretty much evaporated. German reunification is back in mothballs. The Kremlin has made up with Premier Tito. Red arms are flowing to Egypt and the Middle East. Messrs Bulganin and Khrushchev received fanatical welcomes in India. Moscow is hurdling various security pacts to the south with aid, technicians, propaganda, arms. The U.S.S.R. apparently can match Washington with H-bombs, is ahead in airplane production, is overtaking the United States in trained technicians.

And still Mr. Dulles radiates quiet optimism, like a diplomatic Mona Lisa. He doesn't see any particular need to step up foreign aid. He says very distinctly that the United States still has the initiative in Asia and the Middle East; he is confident that Soviet ambitions in Europe have been blocked. He can prove that the Kremlin can't match the United States in dollar-for-dollar aid. The U.S.S.R. hasn't been able to destroy NATO, push the United States out of Europe, divide the Western coalition. There is reason to smile quietly.

Of course, perhaps Mr. Dulles isn't an optimist after all. Perhaps he is whistling in the dark—but can't politically admit it. Or perhaps he doesn't really know what the world score is; or perhaps he knows a lot more than does the Washington Press Corps (could be) and so has grounds for his optimism. After all, his brother, Allen, is head of the CIA, which is supposed to hold a 24-hour vigil in the pulse of the world, is supposed to know the temperatures of nations and the boiling points of every local crisis.

It could be that the Soviets have a serious agricultural crisis; that the struggle for power in the Kremlin is about to burst out again; that Red China is tired of playing second fiddle to the Russian maestros and is going to try for top billing. Perhaps the United States does have the Soviets on the defensive; look at the way Messrs Bulganin and Khrushchev are running around South Asia trying to win friends and black foes. Perhaps Mr.

Adenauer will be German Chancellor indefinitely and can block German unification on Soviet terms. Perhaps President Eisenhower, who single-handedly created the Geneva spirit, can, given time, revive it and revitalize it. Perhaps . . . perhaps.

There is one explanation of Mr. Dulles' optimism that one hears now and again in Washington—though only in whispers, and then admittedly not from administration sources. It is that Mr. Dulles is holding the line, is playing the optimist; is running interference in foreign policy for his chief until the President can fully and effectively take up the full reins of his office again. Thus Mr. Dulles, it is argued, is still operating under summer decisions of the National Security Council and practicing policies that fitted situations four months old. He is using last summer's rules in playing this winter's game.

This explanation does not criticize the President, who is staging a remarkable comeback from his Denver illness, but it explains the apparent rigidity in current foreign policy. Perhaps no major or dramatic shift in foreign policy is immediately needed to meet shifting conditions. But if it is needed it cannot be improvised hastily or put in operation without presidential approval and a considerable measure of discussion, debate, and analysis.

It needs to be remembered that for nearly three months the President was hors de combat as it were, and it takes time to recapture the events of such a period and build a new superstructure on them. It is true that the National Security Council has basic directives on file to govern its actions and decisions; but these, it needs to be remembered, were all premised on the state of world affairs prior to Denver—and a lot has happened since then.

There has been one NSC meeting at Camp David. Another one has been scheduled. But two meetings, particularly when the President has so much to catch up on, are hardly enough if any new dramatic shifts in policy are to be made. Only after a few more weeks can we know what the NSC is cooking—and just what may be back of John Foster Dulles' optimism and enigmatic smile.